



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP IN A DEMOCRACY¹

CHARLES A. ELLWOOD
University of Missouri

The Great War was supposedly fought to "make the world safe for democracy"; while some of us hoped that, purified by the trials of that mighty struggle and ennobled by its heroism, democracy might become "safe for the world." Neither result, however, is yet in evidence; and those of us who were optimistic as to the beneficent results of a victorious war upon our democracy and our civilization must sorrowfully admit the old, well-known truth that war in its effects is destructive, not constructive, and that constructive work for democracy must come through education. The only way we can "make the world safe for democracy" or democracy "safe for the world," it should now be evident, is through educating the world for democracy.

The sober fact is that democracy is now confronting the greatest crisis of its existence, and unless education can do something to foster it and render it successful it must go under. So far from increasing enthusiasm for democracy, the war seems to have had exactly the opposite effect in some quarters. Only recently university presidents, corporation managers, and even politicians have expressed doubts about the ability of the people to govern themselves. Such doubts may seem not unjustified in view of the present disturbed condition of even the most democratic countries. Democracy as a political and social system has, of course, been successful in the past, but under much simpler conditions of life. We must recognize that the relative success of democracy under the simple, rural conditions of life in which our fathers lived is but little argument for the success of democracy in the complex, urban civilization in which we live. The individualistic *laissez faire* democracy of our fathers will not work today. Their simple, rural life demanded only a minimum of

¹An address before the Southern Sociological Congress, Washington, D.C., May 9.

social control, while our complex urban world demands a maximum of control, because social interdependence has been so vastly increased by the use of many things in common. The twenty million people massed in the great cities of our eastern seaboard would soon perish miserably if they were cut off for even a short time from the rest of the country by civil disturbances. Even the scattered striking of a few thousand switchmen throws their food supply into confusion. We have built a gigantic material civilization that resembles nothing so much as a mighty machine which requires almost infinite intelligence and good will to run it in such a way that it will not bring disaster upon us. Yet the intelligence and good will necessary to run this social machine must in a democracy reside in the people themselves. Here, then, is our problem, How are we to secure the intelligence and good will needed in the mass of our citizens to meet the increasingly complex problems of an ever-increasingly complex civilization?

Quite evidently both the advocates of democracy and the leaders of education have been guilty of serious overlookings as to the exact relations which must obtain between education and democracy in complex societies, if democracy is to be successful. Let us face facts as they are. In a democracy the people are the masters. This means that they must solve their own problems. The real sovereign in a democracy is public opinion; but public opinion is only the co-ordination of the individual judgments of the mass of individual citizens. If public opinion is to solve the staggering social and political problems which now confront our nation, it can only be on the condition that a good degree of social and political intelligence has been developed in the mass of citizens. To be sure, social and political leaders may play a dominant part in the formation and guidance of public opinion; but it should never be forgotten that in a democracy the people must provide and select their own leaders. They must provide for the training of wise leaders in their system of public education; then they must have enough social intelligence to distinguish the wise leader from the demagogue. This, again, makes the solution of social and political problems through public opinion a matter of education and of the general diffusion of social intelligence.

To put the matter concretely: the solution of such social and political problems as the harmonization of the relations of capital and labor, the juster distribution of wealth, a just system of taxation, the deflation of our currency, the reduction of the cost of living, the settlement of our international relations, the harmonious adjustment of the negro and the white, the control of immigration, the promotion of agriculture, the sanitation and government of our cities, the repression of vice and crime, all depend upon the development of intelligent public opinion. But this public opinion will depend for its intelligence, in the last analysis, upon the general diffusion of social and political intelligence among the mass of the people. Plainly the success or failure of democracy resolves itself into a matter of the social and political education of the citizen. Not until the nation sees this is there any hope of escape from the ills which now beset us. To think that citizens in a complex democracy like our own can become efficient through common sense and common experience is more foolish and more dangerous than to think that efficient farmers or engineers can be so produced. The problems which even the average citizen in our communities is now called upon to help solve are too complex to be solved intelligently through common sense and experience, but on the contrary require specific social and political education. Such social and political education, rightly conceived and carried out, is the real and the only remedy for the unrest and the disorders of our time.

But before we can discuss wherein such social and political education for citizenship in a democracy should consist, we must note the impediments which still stand in the way of all education in the United States, and how little as yet the public mind has linked the fate of our democracy with education. We are often told that the American people are "crazy over education" and we boast of our schools. How little warrant there is for such exaggeration or boasting, however, the facts disclose. A nation that pays its common-school teachers less than it pays its ditch-diggers and hodcarriers, its highest rank of university professors less than its locomotive engineers, can scarcely be said to be "crazy over education." We have left our schools to be dominated by petty and

local interests, often even without intelligent central supervision. How idle it is to boast of our schools we realize when we are told that nearly 25 per cent of the young men gathered into the training camps to form our national army during the Great War were found to be practically illiterate. Yet these illiterates help to make public opinion and decide public policies on the complex issues before our democracy. We expect them to share in the ideals which make our nation great as well as to fight its battles. Is it any wonder that our democracy often fails when it confronts some of the great crises of human history? Until our schools are at least efficient enough to free us from the curse of illiteracy and until they can free themselves from the blight of petty localism on the one hand and from the blight of inadequate support on the other; until they can become, in a word, agencies of national efficiency and of national service, it seems idle to discuss education for citizenship through them. Adequate social and political education for democracy, of course, cannot be realized until these preliminary difficulties are met.

Assuming, however, that these and similar difficulties have been met, what sort of education for democracy shall we plan? What is an adequate education for citizenship in a democracy? Obviously such an education must aim at creating social intelligence in citizens, on the one hand, and at maximizing co-operation among citizens on the other hand. The creation of social intelligence is the foundation. If democracy means that the people must solve their own problems, then ignorance is the deadliest foe of democracy. Ignorance makes democracy impossible, and of all the forms of ignorance the most deadly in a democracy is sociological ignorance; that is, ignorance of the laws and conditions of human living together. It is this sort of ignorance which breeds crimes, revolutions, bolshevism, anarchy, distrust and antagonism of classes, and even lack of faith in democracy itself. Not that ample knowledge of social laws and conditions would at once and in all cases lead to civic virtue and social harmony, but that it is the necessary foundation on which a harmonious and well-ordered social life can be built up. The more one studies present social life, the more one becomes convinced that the evils

from which we suffer are more due to ignorance than to malevolence. Even in the economic sphere the profiteering of business men and laboring men alike has in it a large element of ignorance. If, for example, everyone understood that our main economic problem is still that of increasing production rather than that of securing a juster distribution of wealth, that if all incomes were equalized even in this the richest nation in the world, they would still be inadequate for a comfortable standard of living, such knowledge alone would help to harmonize the relations between classes. Sheer ignorance, in other words, has led to an unfortunate overemphasis of the importance of the problem of the distribution of wealth, while the problem of the adequate production of wealth still remains unsolved. Similarly, lack of knowledge or imperfect knowledge is at the bottom of most social maladjustments, while misunderstandings and ignorance are the real causes of most of the conflicts of individuals, classes, nations, and races in our human world.

Said a prominent member of the British Parliament recently: "A quarter of a century in politics has converted me to one creed, to which I hold steadfastly in a world of changing political panaceas—the belief that education and knowledge, and the mutual forbearance and understanding sympathy which only knowledge can give, are the only cure for the social and political ills to which mankind is heir. We want information—a ceaseless propaganda of honest information, so that we may understand the complex and difficult problems of the period of transition through which we are now passing."

If these words are true, then the only way out in our civilization is through the developing of more social and political intelligence in the masses; and the easiest way to develop such intelligence is through more social and political education in our schools. Social studies should be fundamental in the curricula of our schools from kindergarten to college and should occupy not less than one-third of the student's time. By "social studies" I mean those that are concerned with human relationships and conditions, such as the study of history, of government, of industry, of family and community life, of public health, of social organization and

progress, and of social standards. Only through such social studies becoming central in our whole scheme of education can the present amazing ignorance of rich and poor alike regarding social conditions and laws be overcome and adequate education for citizenship in a democracy be secured. This is the revolution which is needed to solve our political and social problems and to lead us securely in the path of progress. The trouble is that our schools, held fast in the bonds of a traditional curriculum, and our educators, bound by the narrow educational theories of the past, only touch the fringe of genuine social education. So far as I know, no school or college has as yet definitely accepted the educational revolution of making social studies *central* in the curriculum. Yet how we can have an efficient, intelligent democracy, capable of solving its own problems, on any other condition than that social studies be made central in the curricula of all of our schools I fail to see.

Many profess to fear that such definite social and political education in our schools will work to maintain an established social order and even to sanction abuses of power. The reply is that if social studies are introduced into our schools upon a scientific basis no such effect need be feared. The social sciences necessarily involve searching but impersonal criticism of existing institutions and policies. They of all studies are best fitted to emancipate the mind and to free it from thralldom to mere social tradition. Other studies may be liberating and liberalizing for the mind, but none so profoundly as the social sciences, since they develop an impersonal or scientific attitude toward human affairs. If democracy means free society, then they best prepare for democracy, because they free the mind and thus prepare the way for rational social progress. The truth is that those who oppose social studies in our schools are usually those, whether they are revolutionists or conservatives, who believe that society must rest upon force rather than upon reason. They, in other words, are persons who distrust democracy. Democracy, on the other hand, has everything to gain and nothing to lose, from growing social intelligence and education.

We should not forget that alongside of the formal education of the schools is the informal education of the public press and

public oral discussion, which for the adult population is even more important than the schools in the diffusion of social information and in the formation of public opinion. It is through these agencies that the adult citizens of a democracy must educate one another regarding public questions; hence the importance of keeping them free and untrammelled by selfish interests. If they are kept free, the schools will also maintain their freedom, and we should not need to fear that social education would become an instrument of political conservatism. Educators have every interest, therefore, in maintaining freedom of public discussion and a free press—within the limits, of course, of courtesy, decency, and truth; for they are a part of the necessary machinery for the education of a democracy.

But social education means much more than instruction in social studies, important as that is. The imparting of social knowledge and the development of social intelligence is its foundation, but the socialization of the will, the maximization of the attitude of service, is its crown. Just now the world seems more sadly in need of good will and of unselfish service than of knowledge. Any social education which does not eventuate in the inculcation of social values, standards, and ideals is abortive. But as we have already pointed out the best way to inculcate social standards and ideals is through the scientific study of social facts and conditions. Thus as soon as we have ascertained the conditions and effects of child labor we have the knowledge on which to base a scientific standard regarding it which will compel the assent of all reasonable minds. We have made the mistake in the past of thinking that moral values, social standards, and even patriotism can be taught effectively as abstractions or dogmas. The right way to teach these highest things in social education, however, is undoubtedly through the study of concrete situations and problems, in which these values naturally emerge. If so taught, there will be no danger that the student in later life will regard these things as “mere dogmas.”

The school should maintain and teach the attitude of service at all times. This it should do not dogmatically, so as to stifle individual conscience and judgment, but as an elastic, dynamic ideal which will give a definite social direction to the student's mental

and moral life. Self-interest as a basis for social living has been shown to be inadequate both through the experience of the past and through the study of the laws of human living together. The service ideal of life accordingly will naturally emerge from the study of social conditions and laws, and the school by its discipline and spirit should reinforce this ideal. The inculcation of the service ideal of life—of service beginning in the smaller, primary groups, such as the family and the local community, but extending to the nation and finally to humanity—is, then, the end to be sought in all education for citizenship in a democracy. Thus may we maximize co-operation and minimize conflict in the nation and in the whole world. Thus may we also, through the unexplored possibilities of co-operation or “team work,” make our democracy some day so startlingly efficient that the boasted efficiency of autocracy will look small in comparison.

It should not be overlooked that such a thorough, socialized education for citizenship in a democracy would be essentially a religious education, in that it would aim to secure that consecration of life to the service of the community which ethical religion also aims at. It would be essentially a Christian education, not in a theological sense, but in the sense that it would inculcate the service of humanity as the highest end and aim of life. Thus social education would find that science, religion, and patriotism, now so often foolishly put in opposition to one another, are essentially harmonious and are all essential in education for ideal citizenship.

It should be unnecessary to point out that such a social education, which would throw the emphasis in education upon social intelligence and social service, would leave ample place for literary, physical, vocational, and every other sort of education needed for complete human living. Thus an education which did not include preparation for the serious work of life in a vocational sense would scarcely be worthy to be called social. Only social education would subordinate vocationalization to socialization. It would exalt the social man, the citizen, above his vocation, his physique, or his culture in the narrow sense of that word.

Two final matters of the utmost importance can only be touched upon in concluding our discussion of education for citizenship in a

democracy. The first is the necessity of educating leaders in a democracy. Democracies are like all other human societies—they can achieve great things only through capable leadership. But in a democracy the people themselves must provide and select their own leaders. This means that the whole educational system should be devised to select and train the most capable for social leadership. This places the main responsibility for the success of democracy upon those higher educational institutions which are supposed to be equipped for the training of social and political leaders, namely, the colleges and the universities. Are American colleges and universities awake to their full responsibility in this regard?

The second matter is the need of a national system of education in a democratic nation. Training for intelligent citizenship must be the first concern of the nation, if the nation is to live and to realize its destiny. Such education is a national concern and cannot be left with safety wholly to local interests. It is to our credit that we have devised a system of government which reconciles local and national interests. It should not be difficult to devise a system of education also which will reconcile local and national interests. We need a national minimum in education, and Congress should pass without delay the Smith-Towner bill, or some better bill, to provide at once a national system of education as the one indispensable measure for national reconstruction.

In conclusion, may I say that we need a deeper faith in education as a savior and regenerator of democracy? We need to realize that education is the conscious method of social evolution and so, in the last analysis, the only rational means of social progress. We need to see the vital relation between democracy and education, that both must rise or sink together. But we need especially a practical faith in education, such as will lead us to match every dollar spent for army or navy or military training by at least another dollar spent for our schools. Then, perhaps, we shall be able to safeguard our own democracy, and thus do our bit in making a world safe for democracy.